

Commentary on Katha Upanishad By Sw Krishnananda

The Order of Progression to The Supreme

indriyebhyah parā hy arthā, arthebhyā ca param manah,
manasaś ca parā buddhir buddher ātmā mahān paraḥ. (10)

“Beyond the senses are the objects, beyond them is the mind, beyond the mind is the intellect, beyond the intellect is the Cosmic Mind which is *hiranyagarbha*.”

mahataḥ param avyaktam, avyaktāt puruṣah paraḥ
puruṣān na param kiñcit: sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ. (11)

“Beyond *hiranyagarbha*, the great Self, is *mulaprakriti*, the Unmanifest, beyond It is the *purusha*, the Spirit; and beyond the *purusha*, there is nothing.”

What do we see? The world of objects. The senses see objects and move towards them. They see only the forms which are called objects and do not understand that there is something behind them. So they are running towards them, thinking that there is something in the object which they themselves lack. Looked at in this way, objects are superior to the senses. But we do not want objects; we want to enjoy their colour, taste, touch etc. Thus, a distinction has to be drawn between objects and their qualities or essence, or substance. These subtle essences, hidden in the objects, are superior to them. The senses want not the objects, but the characteristics hidden in them. The objects are not really the centre of desire. They are only a vehicle which holds the counterpart to our interest. We therefore want to utilise objects as agents for our satisfaction.

The most important of all characteristics in the world is restlessness. Whatever be the state in which we are, we are going from one change to another. This indicates that there is something seriously wrong in this world. We are like a person walking on one leg, or riding a cycle with one wheel. It can stand as long as it moves, and when it does not move, it falls. There is only ‘becoming’ everywhere, and there is no ‘being’. Our whole life is activity, not existence. This intention to act, this process of movement throughout one’s life, indicates that there is an urge of our being towards something, like the flowing of a river to the ocean. The river moves, and its movement ceases when it reaches the ocean. Not only we change; everything in the world changes: the world is transient; the world is restless; the world is in motion—it is all the same thing said in different terms. An imperfection, or lack, characterises the whole world of creation. Its motion, the velocity of objects, is what gives

appearance or shape or existence to it. Things do not exist, but pass. This state of affairs is the cause of our unhappiness. We cannot find peace with ourselves because we have not achieved our end. What that end is, is the purport of mantras ten and eleven.

Beyond the drop is the stream; beyond the stream is the rivulet; beyond the rivulet is the river; and beyond the river is the ocean. There is nothing beyond the ocean. This is what these mantras say. Beyond the senses is the essence of the *tanmatras*; beyond them is the mind; beyond it is the intellect; beyond it is the *virat*; beyond It is *hiranyagarbha*; beyond It is *ishvara* or *avyakta*; beyond which is the *purusha*, and beyond the *purusha* there is nothing. The smaller tends towards the larger which is its source. The effect moves towards its cause. That from which a thing has come attracts it, like a mother attracts her children. Planets cling to the sun because they are parts of it. All things in the world tend towards the immediately greater. There is a cause behind a cause until a causeless cause is reached, which we are in search of and which we have not yet seen.

The causeless Cause is not part of the chain of cause and effect; it is different. The ocean of the world is limited, but this Ocean is not only outside the things that flow, but also within. While the ocean is at one end of the river, this Ocean is everywhere. God calls us at all places in the world, not merely in the temples and churches. His presence is not only at one end of the world, in heaven. He is everywhere. He is the *purusha*. That is the final destination beyond which there is nothing. When you reach the *purusha*, something mysterious takes place. There is a tremendous difference between one thing reaching another thing, and the reaching of Him. No unusual occurrence can be noticed until the *purusha* is reached; there is only an ascent till then. But when you touch the last rung of the ladder, when the river enters the ocean of being, something strange takes place: it enters That which it was even before.

The end becomes the means. The causeless cause becomes everything. This transformation is supernormal; impossible to understand. It is not an achievement of the future, like the achievements of the world. Motion is possible until the *purusha* is touched. Then, the process becomes processless. This transformation is final. It is a spiritual transformation, and not a physical or mental one, a change which the preceding effects cannot know. The effect cannot know the cause until it reaches it, and when it reaches its cause, it is no longer there. Thus, there is no such thing as knowing God. You do not know God when you are away from Him and until you reach Him, and when you reach Him, you are not there.

The senses feel far away from physical objects, on account of which they feel drawn towards them. The *panchagni* acts as incentive for the senses to move. The five elements as well as the five essences behind them act reciprocally and produce a sense of mutual attraction. The *tanmatras* pervade not only the objects, but are behind the senses also. And something happens when they unite, like a friend meeting a friend after years. It is not union of two objects, but something more, like the mother's embrace of her child. More than a mere meeting of two objects, there is a feeling which is of greater significance: a consciousness swallowing up the consciousness of particulars, and the two become one; not in the physical sense of the term; a union not even psychological merely, but more fundamental.

The essence behind sense-perception is not properly understood, and so we are caught up in *moha*; we are in a helpless condition. This condition of helplessness is *samsara*. It is a pitiable state of affairs when there is a mutual reaction between subject and object caused by a force of which no one knows. Is there no hope out of this situation? The Upanishad says that there is. It lies in a higher integration of our feeling, thinking and understanding. We should not be limited to the objects and senses, that is, we should not be reduced to the level of objects. We are friendly to them because we have reduced ourselves to their status.

The *tanmatras* are the deeper essence behind objects—including our body, which is also an object. They are not electric energy, but finer than the molecules, protons and electrons of the scientists. While electric energy is wholly inert, without intelligence to direct itself, the *tanmatras* are midway between the cosmic *prana* and the world, being the vital forces regulating the physical objects and thus superior to and higher than these and the senses. There are three *gunas* of *prakriti*; and the *sattvic* element of these constitutes the *tanmatras*, the *rajasic* element constitutes the *prana*, and the *tamasic* one the physical world. Hence, beyond the physical world, there are the *tanmatras*; and beyond them, there is the mind constituted of their subtle, *sattvic* principles like: *sabda*, *sparsa*, *rupa*, *rasa* and *gandha*.

Still superior in function to the mind is the intellect. While the mind functions indeterminately, there is decision and clarified understanding in *buddhi*; it makes decisions in all matters. The senses give distorted reports, the mind collects them and the intellect passes judgment. Here, we have reached the end of the human world. The highest faculty in man is the intellect. So man is said to be a rational being. But, says the Upanishad, there is something superior to the intellect. He has to rise beyond himself by a process of self-transcendence which is described in these two mantras. What is

beyond the intellect? We cannot know, because knowing ceases there. The Upanishads are intuitional declarations and go further than mere knowing. Internal and transcending, but unknown to it, are the wider cosmic powers.

When we exceed the intellect, we go beyond the physical. The *jiva* goes to the *virat* when his intelligence rises to an understanding of what is beyond it. There, human consciousness reaches a state of existence feebly felt in ecstatic moments. The Upanishad now goes to the universal Reality in its lower manifestations. *Virat* is superior to the *jiva* who is part of It, just as limbs are parts of the body. *Virat*, *hiranyagarbha* and *ishvara* are the threefold manifestations on the cosmic level—corresponding to the threefold manifestations of the individual: the waking, the dream and the deep sleep states. While we are aware of the body in waking, of the psychological condition in dream and the causal one in deep sleep, there is a lot of difference in regard to the character and function between these individual and universal states; the *virat* is not just like waking, and so on. Higher than the *virat* is the Cosmic Mind or Intellect or Ego which makes up the *hiranyagarbha* in Vedantic terminology, or Brahma, the Creator, in the Puranas.

What is beyond *virat* and *hiranyagarbha*? There is a twofold answer to this: from the point of view of the experiencing consciousness, and from the point of view of the state itself. Seen from the latter, it is *avyakta*, *mulaprakriti* or *mahamaya*; the precondition of everything. But seen from the former, the experiencing consciousness, which is *ishvara*, we may ask: 'What is in deep sleep?' The answer to this question is the answer to His character. From one point of view, there is nothing in deep sleep, and from another, there is pure consciousness. Since no phenomena take place, there is nothing; but yet there is awareness. Likewise, the awareness of existence of *prakriti* is the universal *ishvara*.

He is the cosmic Witness of all things, and there must be something even beyond Him because, even here, is duality. Transcending Him is the *purusha*. The *purusha* is not a male, It is Being. That which is cosmically existent always is the *purusha*. It is another name for the Absolute. Beyond the *mahat* is *avyakta*; beyond *avyakta* is the *purusha*. What is beyond the *purusha*? Beyond It, there is nothing. Once you reach It, you have reached the end. This is the limit of experience, and the goal of all life; not merely of life, but also of non-life. There is no such thing as dead matter. There is only difference in the degrees of life; and everything tends to This.

This description of the gradation of evolution is given in the context of self-control. Unless we take the help of the higher power, this is not possible. We try to control the senses by will-power, which is wedded to them. If it were wholly independent of them, it would work, but because reasoning is based on the report of the senses, self-control demands the use of the superior power. The intention behind the gradation stated in the mantras here is to show that we control the senses by the mind, the mind by the intellect, the intellect by the cosmic *virat*, the *virat* by the Cosmic Mind, the Cosmic Mind by the Cosmic Intellect or *ishvara*, and finally by the *purusha*.

Self-control reaches its *paragati*, or culmination, in *atmasakshatkara*, or God-realisation. It is therefore not merely a closing of the senses; it is the practical side of yoga. The whole description is one of *dhyana*, or meditation. The best way of self-control is to think of God-realisation. A mere thought of Him is enough to exert and exercise a control on the mind. When you are overpowered by a thought of God, the senses cannot function. When you are in a holy shrine, in the presence of holy men, in an intense feeling of God, self-control automatically comes, without effort. But yoga is conscious withdrawal. A deliberate attempt is called upon by the *jiva*, and for this, a meditative process is prescribed. All yoga is meditation, finally, whatever be the technique adopted.

That the senses perceive the world, is the present fact, but you are not seeing what is behind the object, says the Upanishad. So let the senses begin to visualise what is behind the forms, internal to the objects and our own bodies. The *tanmatras* operate behind both; let the consciousness be fixed on the *tanmatras*. Meditate on the fact that the objects are not all. There is *prana-shakti* behind them and our body, without which these cannot be active; let the consciousness be fixed on this. It is not that the *prana-shakti* is all, there is the Cosmic Mind behind it; let the consciousness be fixed on That. Higher than this Cosmic Mind is the Cosmic Intellect; let the consciousness be fixed on This. Consciousness should extend itself beyond: just as I am, others also are, and just as there is consciousness within me, there is consciousness behind others. There are not many consciousnesses: there is a totality of consciousness behind everything. This Consciousness is the base; let the consciousness be fixed on it. There is, beyond all this, a potentiality for all creation, *ishvara*-Consciousness; let the consciousness be fixed on It. This is one kind of meditation.

What are objects? They are known by a consciousness; it envelops them. Because the objects are known by consciousness, it is also ultimately inherent in them. Finally, there is only a flood of

consciousness which fills all. This is *satchidananda*. This *ananda* is sufficient to exert control over our senses.

The Taittirya Upanishad given the gradation of happiness. Human happiness in a higher degree than we experience – the happiness of an emperor of the whole world, youthful, capable of enjoying everything without disease, without any limitations – is the lowest unit.

Higher than this is that of the *gandharvas*. Higher than this is that of the *pitrīs*, higher than this is that of the *devas*; higher than this is Indra's; higher than Indra's is Brihaspati's; higher than Brihaspati's is Prajapati's; higher than Prajapati's is Brahma's. You can meditate on this, too. There is such a reservoir of bliss. Why go to the tinsels of objects?

God is Supreme Existence, is one aspect of meditation described in these mantras. God is Supreme Knowledge, is another aspect of meditation. God is Supreme Bliss, is another one. So you can meditate on these three aspects: God as Supreme Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. This is the internal implication.